Farmers' Attitude towards a Participatory Research Method Used to Evaluate Weed Management Strategies in Bananas

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ABSTRACT

In this study, farmers were engaged in a participatory research project and their attitudes evaluated. The purpose was to identify the characteristics of farmers who are favourably predisposed towards meaningful participation in the process. Several cover crops were tested for possible use in the management of watergrass (Commelina diffusa), a noxious weed in banana cultivation. Small, limited-resource farmers were exposed to the essentials of systematic research through a process of experiential learning using participatory techniques. Thirty-six farmers evaluated three cover crops against the current weed control practice of farmers, which served as the control. Farmers and researchers collaborated on the experimental design, treatment allocation, data to be collected and the form of the analysis. Summary data were subjected by the farmers to the Overlap Test to evaluate differences among the treatments. Results indicated that one cover crop, Desmodium heterocarpon, was better than the others in controlling watergrass. These results were confirmed by ANOVA. A Likert-type scale, used to assess farmers' attitude, showed that overall, farmers were generally favourable towards the process. Differences in responses to attitudinal statements were based mainly on farmers' differing education levels. Some level of attrition was experienced in this process, mainly by the older and more experienced farmers. The younger, less experienced farmers completed the trials to a large extent. The results provide useful information for the selection of farmers to be involved in future participatory technology development initiatives.

KEY WORDS: Bananas, Watergrass (Commelina diffusa), Cover crops, Participatory research, Attitudes, Small farmers